

Education Is Good As Teacher

By Lois Martin

Take away your books and your buildings and you've got the stronghold of education - the teacher. Finding the clout behind solid learning is like shaking down the old coal furnace. After all has fallen through the cracks, only the live coals remain. And like those embers, a good teacher's influence kindles the minds of students long after they've left the class-room.

Mind you, I'm willing to pay homage to vital materials, instructive books, well-planned school buildings and strong program planning. But things are never so important as people. At any level of education the prime ingredient to insure the product is the good teacher. There's no higher calling, no greater challenge, no loftier goal than to play a part in the development of a child's mind.

Only the parent has a stronger, longer commitment. Right or wrong we still look to the teacher to inspire, to instill, to exemplify, to teach. If there's a mature leadership in the home, the good teacher underlines it. If there's strength lacking in the home, a worthy teacher provides it.

There's a motto attached to the child abuse campaign: "A bad childhood lasts a lifetime." So does the influence of the unique teacher, the one who brought personal worth to a student through education.

Good teachers don't come out of a mold. They're special characters and they're not confined to any particular location or age level. They crop up and take root indiscriminately.

Many of my teachers were memorable. I remember Mr. Smith (James) and his relentless fondness for iambic pentameter, Edgar Allen Poe and gesticulations that got chalk on his suit. There was Mrs. Fortier (Olive) who taught us foreign languages. In addition to Latin, Mrs. Fortier instructed propriety where we were wanting. To Richard Bickford goes credit for sparking the minds of eighth graders. And with lingering intrepidity, I recall Dr. Hankins, a college professor, who put the fear of God in college freshmen who thought they knew all there was to know about English. Above all else she taught me not to raise my hand and burst forth with confidence until I was dead sure of the answer. She viewed arrogance as ignorance and proved her case often.

But of all the teachers who've worked to educate, there's one to whom I've been exposed that could get blood out of turnip, make a silk purse out of a sow's ear, teach the least of her students the most they could learn. Aunt Lote was an educator.

Lois Perkins Wessel, for whom I was named, taught school for more than 40 years and was retired with full honors several years ago. When I was a grammar school student, it was my occasional privilege to visit her school. It was a one-room school house in Sedgwick, Maine, serving grades 1-8. That little building (plenty of outside recess space) was the scene of lesson-learning at the hands of a tireless teacher.

There were surely special needs there for the bright, the under-privileged, the ambitious, the limited. And from each mind Aunt Lote gleaned more substance than students thought they had. There was a wood stove in the room that required tending. The flag hung near her desk and was fervently addressed each morning as were the nails of the students who got a buffer course in personal habits.

She commanded the courses for study with elan, shifting the students from their desks to circles of chairs for group work. She oversaw the institution like a general training a specialized division of forces. And if you didn't learn it one way, you'd get it another. For Aunt Lote a pupil's failure to learn would have been a personal defeat. There were no cobwebs in her classroom thinking. With gusto, perseverance, studies were pursued and conquered. She was no party to ignorance or indolence.

And for that matter she'd brook no insolence. The youngster who guessed he'd fool around only did so once. They were quick learners in that school house. It didn't take them long to get it though their heads that Aunt Lote saw discipline as the direct pathway to development of minds. But they saw through her ways. They knew the same person who gave homework orders also gave compassion, special homebaked goods, a ride home.

She taught the children in her realm to expect something of themselves and she showed them how to find it. I used to marvel at the penmanship of the students. They all wrote like Aunt Lote, as soon as they could get the hang of the pencil grip, they were imitating her strong scroll.

And though her guidelines were firm, they included plenty of room for a good laugh when it wasn't at anyone's expense. A joke after all is when everybody gets to laugh.

Certainly those best qualified to honor her contributions as an educator are her students. They've done so verbally. More than that they've kept her influence going through their own children, and in some cases, their teaching.

True I was raised with people who held the teaching profession in high esteem. The necessity of sound, responsible educators was brought home to me by parents and indeed other aunts.

PATCHES

And in my own children I hear the echos of earlier classrooms, I can see the influences of some fine teachers being carried over into higher grades. It's true that profession no more attracts only top notch workers any more than other fields offer only experts.

But if we're lucky there are enough good teachers to go around, enough determined people to insure the learning process is handed down. If the strength of our heritage is based on responsible educators, so surely is our future.

Musings...

By John Cutler

□ Fred Allen said a conference is a gathering of important people who singly can do nothing, but together can decide that nothing can be done.

□ If she keeps mumbling, it's hard to get along with a mutter-in-law.

□ When William Randolph Hearst offered Arthur Brisbane a 6-month vacation, he refused. "If I quit writing my column for a half a year it might affect the circulation of your newspapers. Then, again, it might not."

□ Every South Shore town has at least one selectman who thinks like Robespierre: "There go the people. I must follow them because I am their leader."

□ I'll bet Colonel Sanders can't kid those folks in Kentucky.

□ Why didn't you tell me earlier to sell my Kool Aid stock?

Sitter Course

The PM Club of Hingham is sponsoring a two-session free baby-sitting clinic at the Hingham Public Library March 31 and April 7. Each Saturday session will last from 10 until 11:30 a.m., and is planned for boys and girls in grades 5-8. Students in grade 4 whose parents feel they would benefit from the instruction are also invited.

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